

crimes. And murder, manslaughter, and murder of a pregnant woman can be, and often are, the final, tragic culmination of domestic violence. When these types of crimes are presented to commanders, they may be just the tip of an iceberg—the tip of an iceberg of cases that we all agree should be handled by a special prosecutor.

So if we truly want to help survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence, we have to acknowledge that some of those crimes don't happen in a vacuum. We must remove all serious crimes out of the chain of command and into the hands of trained prosecutors who have the education, training, and experience that these cases require and that our servicemembers deserve.

The Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act does exactly that, and it is supported by the major veterans service organization groups, as well as groups like the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence and the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, which recognize the true impact of this reform. It is also supported by a bipartisan, filibuster-proof majority of Senators who should be allowed the opportunity to cast their vote.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that at a time to be determined by the majority leader in consultation with the Republican leader, the Senate Committee on Armed Services be discharged from further consideration of S. 1520 and the Senate proceed to its consideration; that there be 2 hours for debate equally divided in the usual form, and that upon the use or yielding back of that time, the Senate vote on the bill with no intervening action or debate.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. REED. I object, Madam President.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I have been to the floor several times with Senator GILLIBRAND not only to compliment her on the hard work she has put into this bill for so many years now—I think going back to 2013—but also to give my support to this effort as well. She doesn't need the compliments. She doesn't want them. But I say that she is entitled to the hard work that she has put into this bill, and it is time that we pass this legislation.

We are told that the bill will be considered by the Armed Services Committee as part of the NDAA. That is not a good reason to deny consideration as a stand-alone bill on the floor, which is what Senator GILLIBRAND has been to this floor numerous times to get done, and each time was objected to.

Now, the Armed Services Committee serves this Senate well for what it does

on military policy, but when it comes to this particular piece of legislation, it is unfortunate that the Committee has a track record of gutting provisions that they don't like, even after the provisions receive the votes to be included.

On another issue, I want to recall what the Senate and House conferees did to a bill to prevent cuts to the Air National Guard. The provision was included in both the House and Senate NDAA but was quietly struck from the conference report. And bringing this bill separately on the floor of the U.S. Senate and getting it passed will prevent like things from happening to this sexual assault legislation.

So this legislation is needed now.

I think Senator GILLIBRAND has said it has 66 cosponsors, and that is exactly right, because there are far too many women and men in the Armed Forces being sexually assaulted and most never see justice. The rates of retaliation are too high, and prosecutions are too low.

Now, over the past month, I have heard favorable comments about attacking this issue from President Biden. I have heard an independent commission at the Pentagon speak to it. I have heard Secretary Austin speak to it. Now, whether they specifically support this legislation or not, they at least have admitted that sexual assault in the military is a major, major problem that needs to be dealt with in some way, but I am saying it will never be dealt with until we get Senator GILLIBRAND's legislation passed.

More importantly, it has the votes—66 votes in the U.S. Senate, for sure, and probably more when people have to put their vote on the line to be a stand-alone piece of legislation. It is time for the legislation to finally move forward, and I would urge my colleagues to allow it to proceed.

But as has happened before, we found out today is not that day. But that day should have been years ago, considering this problem is getting worse from year to year and, more importantly, the fact that it is such a big problem, and retaliation is such a big problem that you don't even get accurate statistics on the number of people that have been sexually assaulted, because they know if they go forward and report it, they will be retaliated against. It is a situation that we have dealt with for too long without the solutions that have been promised working, and so the only way to solve this problem is with Senator GILLIBRAND's legislation.

I yield the floor.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, over the last 16 months, no community has been spared from the devastation of COVID-19. The virus itself has claimed the lives of more than 600,000 Americans, including more than 50,000 Texans, and we are still gaining a fuller picture of the far-reaching consequences of this pandemic.

We know that the mitigation efforts led to the closure of countless small businesses and upended the livelihoods of millions of workers. The transition to virtual learning robbed children of valuable time alongside their peers in the classroom. And the emotional and financial stresses of the pandemic led to devastating consequences for our friends and neighbors who were already in a vulnerable situations.

As families spent more time isolating at home last year, we saw an increase in domestic violence. Individuals who were already experiencing anxiety and depression faced even greater challenges during this difficult period. And those battling substance-use disorders faced an even steeper uphill climb. On top of the stress and isolation of the pandemic, many lost access to treatment facilities and outreach programs.

No community has been spared from the wrath of the opioid epidemic. In 2019, there were more than 70,000 overdose deaths in America, a devastating number. Now we have a much clearer picture of how this crisis worsened in 2020.

Last year, more than 93,000 Americans died from drug overdoses. That is more than a 30-percent increase over the previous year. It marks the largest annual increase in at least three decades.

Following years of fighting to turn the tide on the opioid epidemic, this is a stunning blow and a deep disappointment. Here in the Senate, this issue is about as bipartisan as they come. As I said, every State, every community has been hit by the scourge of opioids, and every person in this Chamber, I believe, wants to turn the tide on this crisis.

In 2016, thanks to the leadership of our friend Senator PORTMAN of Ohio, and the hard work of a bipartisan group of Senators, we passed what became known as CARA, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, to help end this devastating cycle of drug abuse and death. Just a couple of years ago, we celebrated some incremental progress. In 2018, drug overdoses were down, or deaths from drug overdoses were down 4 percent from the previous year, the first decrease in nearly three decades.

But, unfortunately, that trend was short-lived. Overdose deaths increased in 2019, and they skyrocketed in 2020. Now is the time for the Senate to take further action and help the American people fight back.

Tomorrow, the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control will hold a hearing on the Federal Government's response to the drug overdose crisis. We will hear from experts, including the acting directors of the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, as well as Dr. Nora Volkow, the Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse. I hope we will learn more about what additional steps we can take to reverse this concerning trend, as well as what more needs to be done.

One of the most effective ways to avoid drug overdose deaths, though, is to prevent those drugs from ever reaching our communities in the first place.

And, of course, Customs and Border Protection plays a vital role in stopping illicit drugs from entering our country. And it has seen an alarming amount of drugs coming across our southern border, as I speak—one of the most concerning, of course, being fentanyl, a synthetic opioid.

Depending on your body weight, 2 milligrams of fentanyl can be lethal; a kilogram, which is 2.2 pounds, could kill 500,000 people; 2.2 pounds of fentanyl, something you could put a couple of kilograms in a backpack and walk it over to the southwestern border.

In fiscal year 2021, so far, Customs and Border Protection has seized more than 8,500 pounds of fentanyl. For context, that is a 78-percent increase over the previous year, and we still have 3 months to go. The amount of fentanyl that we have interdicted in the past 9 months is just shy of the total weight from fiscal years 2018, 2019, and 2020 combined. That is a dramatic increase.

And it has deadly consequences. Nearly three-quarters of fatal overdoses last year were attributed to opioids—some synthetic, like fentanyl; others like heroin—manufactured primarily in Mexico, 90 percent of which is imported in the United States comes from Mexico.

The alarming increase in the supply coming across our southwestern border foreshadows even more devastating overdose statistics in the months and years to come. And fentanyl isn't the only dangerous drug moving across our southern border. Methamphetamine, cocaine, and heroin, as I said, are coming into our country at alarming rates.

If people don't care about the humanitarian crisis at the border that has seen a million encounters with Border Patrol the last year alone, if they don't care about the fact that we are not stopping illegal immigration into the country and what consequences that will have on our country for many years to come, hopefully they care a little bit about the drug overdose deaths that are caused by the importation—illegal importation of these drugs across the southern border.

According to the Drug Enforcement Administration's National Drug Threat Assessment, the vast majority of her-

oin, as I said, comes from Mexico—a staggering 92 percent, to be precise.

As we have discussed the border on the crisis, I have talked about the cascading consequences of this migration surge. When Border Patrol agents are pulled off the front lines to care for migrant children, as many of them are, it creates a huge gap in our border controls and creates huge security vulnerabilities. It, of course, makes it more difficult for the Border Patrol to do the job that they signed on for, which is to interdict dangerous people and substances, including these dangerous drugs.

So until we can get this current humanitarian crisis under control, we are making it nearly impossible for the Border Patrol to catch or deter the cartels from moving their poison across the border, and we are creating even more risk for Americans already struggling with addiction and drug abuse.

Getting the border under control should be a top priority for the Biden administration, but they seem completely oblivious to what is happening, and they don't really seem to understand the dynamics. We know the traditional push factors—poverty and violence in your home country—but it takes a lot for people to want to leave their home country and take the dangerous trek to the United States.

But, of course, they are having the coyotes, the human smugglers, whisper in their ears and say: For \$5,000 or for \$7,000, we will get you to America.

But it is also the pull factors. It is the perception that if you come to the border, that you will successfully make your way into the interior and you will be allowed to stay. Of course, that is not what our laws call for, but that is exactly what these smugglers, the coyotes, are planning on and what is attracting, like a huge magnet, hundreds of thousands, even a million people this year alone, across our southern border. And it is the same chaos and confusion caused by this flooding of the border and the diversion of law enforcement that is allowing these drugs to come across the border, which, as I said, have killed 93,000 Americans in the last year alone.

In addition to stopping these drugs from making their way into our country, we also need to identify more effective ways to break the cycle of addiction, and that is especially true for those individuals who have been incarcerated. It is difficult to know the exact numbers, but research shows that an estimated 65 percent of the U.S. prison population has an active substance use disorder. Without access to treatment while incarcerated, these men and women face a steep, maybe an impossible, uphill climb after they are released. In order to give an incarcerated individual the strongest possible opportunity after serving their time in our criminal justice system, we need to invest more in effective treatment options once they leave prison.

The good news is there is already a bipartisan bill out there that does ex-

actly that. Earlier this year, Senator WHITEHOUSE—the Senator from Rhode Island—and I introduced the Residential Substance Use Disorder Treatment Act to help incarcerated individuals break this cycle of addiction.

Now, we know we are not going to be able to save everybody, but for those who are willing to put in the hard work and effort and to seek the counseling and treatment that is necessary, we believe we can save some lives. This legislation updates the residential substance abuse treatment program and expands access to treatment in jails and prisons across the country. The program, as it currently exists, already provides incarcerated individuals with access to treatment for substance use disorders. That treatment is coupled with programs to prepare these men and women for reentry into civil society and provide community-based treatment once they are released.

Because of these men and women who have struggled hard while they have been in prison and in jail to overcome their addiction, many are returning to the same conditions and the same friends and the company and communities that they came from. Without this kind of help, we know what the results are likely to be.

Our legislation opens up even more opportunities for successful rehabilitation and continued recovery. It provides providers with more options to treat substance use disorders. It requires program staff to be trained in the science of addiction, evidence-based therapies and strategies for continuity of care, and it ensures programs are affiliated with providers who can continue treatment after incarceration. In short, these changes will give the formerly incarcerated men and women the best possible shot at living healthier, longer, and more productive lives.

I am sure it is no surprise that this kind of legislation has strong bipartisan support, both here in the Senate and among the various organizations that work in this field. Twenty-seven groups wrote a letter to Senator WHITEHOUSE and me endorsing this legislation. This includes a broad range of criminal justice and behavioral groups, such as the Addiction Policy Forum, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, and the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America.

I haven't heard from a single Senator, Republican or Democrat, who has expressed oppositions or even concern about the bill. This is an example of the bipartisan, commonsense actions that we need to be taking more often and, in this case, to address a very serious and clearly growing problem. These commonsense policy changes can help people struggling with drug abuse to finally escape the cycle and build a better life when they return to their communities.

I hope that the Senate will soon pass this bill and move it one step closer to President Biden's desk. The dramatic

spike in drug overdose deaths last year should serve as a call to action for all of us. To secure our border, to help those struggling to overcome addiction, the tools and the training to do so, there is an urgent action that we can take and should take to address both.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam President, there was such an interesting occurrence that happened down the street a bit at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue last weekend, and it is when White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki unveiled the scheme that her colleagues in the West Wing had worked out with Big Tech.

Well, what they are setting about to do is to remove—and I am quoting her—“problematic” content from Facebook and other digital platforms. That is right. They, the White House team, have decided that they are going to work with Big Tech, and they are going to remove “problematic”—their term—content from Facebook and other digital platforms.

Now, I am certain that the White House was very confident that the press would treat this rather bizarre admission like they have treated other blatant oversteps coming out of this administration. After all, they, the press, have provided reliable cover for this White House since Inauguration Day.

But here is the problem. It is no longer Inauguration Day. There is now a record to consider, and I will tell you what, no matter what they do, the mainstream media is not going to be able to turn the clock back on this overstep.

In just 6 months, the Biden administration has done an admirable job showing the American people exactly who they are. We have seen enough at this point to take the admission of being in cahoots with Big Tech at face value. The administration has intentionally overwhelmed the airwaves with big promises that are conveniently light on details.

And there is a good reason for that. What President Biden and the Democrats are trying to do would fundamentally transform this country into something that we, the people, would have a very difficult time even recognizing.

They got off to a great start toward their goals by killing jobs in the name of climate extremism and opening the border to a flood of illegal immigrants with no plan at all to manage the influx. They just said: Let's send them to the States, and let local communities and States cover this cost.

They tried to dupe the American people into getting behind a so-called infrastructure plan that was anything but infrastructure. Then they doubled

down on a brazen attempt to extend the Federal Government's control over schools and homes. They labeled this spending spree the American Families Plan to provide cover for yet another attack on, what else, the nuclear family.

Then they launched an all-out war on the ballot box in the name of the people. And now we see that they worked out a perfect system to force the opposition to shut up—just throw a flag on your opponents and watch their digital footprint and their freedom of speech evaporate.

There is a way to shut them down. It is called government-approved messaging. Obviously, somewhere in the White House, they tucked their realities that they alluded to back in January, and now this is what we are seeing.

I know we already have members of the mainstream media who are running defense on behalf of this little collaboration between the White House and Big Tech, but it is time to get serious about what is going on here. The President of the United States is using the full force of his administration to silence his political opponents. That is correct.

This isn't just dystopian. It also raises serious questions about how much pressure the Federal Government can put on a private entity to restrict political speech. Think about that. This administration, working with Big Tech, is going to deem certain messages government approved and others as being open to censorship. It is, indeed, a complete violation of the trust the American people put in Joe Biden when they sent him to the White House.

But as the new majority has made clear, to tear down and rebuild the United States in their own image is something that is a goal. And in order to do that, they attack the foundation. They have to get rid of all the things that make America so incredibly special: our commitment to safety and security, the importance of the family, and the near sacrosanct promise of free speech and open debate.

They have gotten off to a pretty good start, those Democrats. But for their vision to take hold, the Democratic majority must convince a critical mass of their countrymen to adopt their same narrow viewpoint. Fortunately, the American people are not accustomed to doing what they are told simply because an authority figure said go do it.

Here is a quote that former President Reagan made regularly, and I know we have heard it and seen it on this floor several times so far this year:

Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. It has to be fought for and defended by each generation.

That is so important for us to remember. It is important because it is something that we are seeing really kind of lived out right now. We have to take this as something of a warning

when you look at the steps that this administration is taking. If anything, they are taking big steps to see just how far they can push the limits of democracy: How much will the people take? How much freedom are they willing to give up?

Just about every single policy coming out of this White House has been used by the Democrats as a weapon to diminish freedom in the name of a preapproved socialist fantasy. And in that fantasy, there is no room for free speech or dissent. Censorship becomes normalized. It is expected. Collectivism replaces individualism. The philosophies of democracy and self-determination fall victim to the moving goalposts of a living Constitution, and freedom is reduced to an outdated trope that only the unenlightened cling to.

I wonder, how many people in this country do you think actually have that as a goal? How many do you think are wanting to give up their free speech and their freedom and hand it over to the government and let the government decide what they are going to give back to them, how much freedom they are going to allow them to exercise over their daily life, over their children's education, over the education that they want to have, or the job they want to have, or the home they want to live in, or the car that they want to drive? Do you really think that Americans want to give their freedom up?

Since the 2016 election, the left has existed in a state of perpetual hysteria. It has been over the threat that our God-given freedom poses threats to their radical, socialist agenda. But instead of taking the conventional route of persuasion, they chose a high-pressure guilt campaign to force people into a prepackaged American experience. They want everyone marching in line with the daily talking points because we want calm, they say. Democracy is too messy. It is too unpredictable. No one wants to exist in that system, they say.

But I differ in my opinion. Yes, it is messy, but this big, beautiful, diverse mess is what sets this country apart. It makes us strong and successful and unites us under the common cause of freedom. And as we are all well aware, it has also turned this shining city on a hill into a magnet for criticism from nations foundering under the disastrous consequences of their great socialist experiment.

I would implore my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to stop trying to fit in with these failing systems. Stop diminishing the cause of freedom because it inconveniences you. Abandon your fear of open debate. This constant refusal to engage says much more about the strength of your policy positions than it does about ours. Above all, stop ignoring the American people. They didn't vote for this. They do not want this.

It is so interesting to me every weekend to go home and listen to Tennesseans who talk about the changes